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The Military Buildup in Cuba

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THE MILITARY BUILDUP IN CUBA

THE PROBLEM

To assess the strategic and political significance of the recent military buildup in Cuba and of the possible future development of additional military capabilities there.

CONCLUSIONS

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A. We believe that the USSR values its position in Cuba primarily for the political advantages to be derived from it, and consequently that the main purpose of the present military buildup in Cuba is to strengthen the Communist regime there against what the Cubans and the Soviets conceive to be a danger that the US may attempt by one means or another to overthrow it. The Soviets evidently hope to deter any such attempt by enhancing Castro's defensive capabilities and by threatening Soviet military retaliation. At the same time, they evidently recognize that the development of an offensive military base in Cuba might provoke US military intervention and thus defeat their present purpose. ((Paras. 1-11))

B. In terms of military significance, the current Soviet deliveries are substantially improving air defense and coastal defense capabilities in Cuba. Their political significance is that, in conjunction with the Soviet statement of 11 September, they are likely to be regarded as ensuring the continuation of the Castro regime in power, with consequent discouragement to the opposition at home and in exile. The threat inherent in these developments is that, to the extent that the Castro regime thereby gains a sense of security at home,

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It will be emboldened to become more aggressive in fomenting revolutionary activity in Latin America. (Paras. 18-21)

C. As the buildup continues, the USSR may be tempted to establish in Cuba other weapons represented to be defensive in purpose, but of a more "offensive" character: e.g., light bombers, submarines, and additional types of short-range surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs). A decision to provide such weapons will continue to depend heavily on the Soviet estimate as to whether they could be introduced without provoking a US military reaction. (Paras. 22-28)

D. The USSR could derive considerable military advantage from the establishment of Soviet medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba, or from the establishment of a Soviet submarine base there. As between these two, the establishment of a submarine base would be the more likely. Either development, however, would be incompatible with Soviet practice to date and with Soviet policy as we presently estimate it. It would indicate a far greater willingness to increase the level of risk in US-Soviet relations than the USSR has displayed thus far, and consequently would have important policy implications with respect to other areas and other problems in East-West relations. (Paras. 29-33)

E. The Latin American reaction will be to the evidence of an increased Soviet commitment to Cuba, rather than to the technical implications of the military buildup. Many Latin Americans will fear and resent a Soviet military intrusion into the Hemisphere, but will regard the problem as one to be met by the US and not their responsibility. We estimate the chances are better now than they were at Punta del Este to obtain the necessary two-thirds OAS majority for sanctions and other steps short of direct military action aimed at Cuba. If it became clear that the USSR was establishing an "offensive" base in Cuba, most Latin American governments would expect the US to eliminate it, by whatever means were necessary, but many of them would still seek to avoid direct involvement. (Paras. 34-37)

DISCUSSION

I. CONSIDERATIONS UNDERLYING SOVIET POLICY IN CUBA

1. We believe that the USSR values its position in Cuba primarily for the political advantages to be derived from it, and that the main purpose of the present military buildup in Cuba is to strengthen the Communist regime there against what the Cubans and the Soviets conceive to be a danger that the US may attempt by one means or another to overthrow it. The Soviets evidently hope to deter any such attempt by enhancing Castro's defensive capabilities and by threatening Soviet military retaliation. At the same time, they evidently recognize that the development of an offensive military base in Cuba might provoke US military intervention and thus defeat their present purpose.

2. The Soviets consider that the Cuban Revolution and their association with it have severely damaged the prestige of the US and greatly enhanced that of the USSR, throughout the world. They see in the case of Cuba an effective demonstration that, anywhere in the world, a "colonial" people can throw off the "imperialist yoke" and, with the indispensable aid and protection of the USSR, successfully maintain its independence against "imperialist" counteraction. They especially value the effect of this demonstration in Latin America and also value Cuba as an advanced base for the support of radical revolutionary elements in Latin America.

3. Although initially the Soviets were guarded in their relations with the Castro regime, in the past year both they and Castro have undertaken moves which make their ties much closer. Thus Moscow's commitment to the survival and success of the Cuban Revolution is deepening. The Soviets have appar-

ently concluded that they must invest more heavily to protect their stake in Cuba.

4. Because of heightening Soviet concern over the state of the Cuban economy, Moscow last spring agreed substantially to expand and liberalize its economic assistance program to Cuba. Indeed, Soviet economic aid to Cuba now involves an extensive program planned to sustain and gradually to develop the economy. The Soviets have thus clearly demonstrated their belief that Cuba, with Soviet support, can achieve sufficient progress to serve as a stimulus for revolutionaries elsewhere in Latin America.

5. During roughly the same period (last spring), the Soviets also apparently concluded that the Castro regime would have to be provided with accelerated military aid. Castro almost certainly had long demanded a much more substantial Soviet program. More important, however, we believe the decision reflected Soviet concern that its expanding role in Cuba might be terminated by a US attempt to overthrow the Castro regime. The rapid military buildup in Cuba was thus intended in large part to impress the US with the increased costs and risks of any attempt to overthrow the Cuban regime by force.

6. In line with this objective, the Soviet statement of 11 September was in part designed to dissuade the US from making a decision to intervene in Cuba. By stressing the "defensive" nature of the Cuban buildup it sought to convince the US (and the world at large) that the military buildup in Cuba does not constitute a threat. At the same time, however, by raising the spectre of general war, it stressed the gravity of the risk involved in US intervention. The statement as a whole is probably a substitute for the

guarantees which the Castro regime almost certainly has demanded. While it carefully avoids an explicit commitment to defend Cuba in the event of US attack, it does further engage Soviet prestige to ensuring the survival of the Castro regime.

7. The absence of such an explicit commitment reflects the Soviets' basic disinclination to hazard their own safety for the sake of Cuba. They are willing, indeed anxious, to deflate US prestige and power in Latin American opinion and to provide the Cubans with the economic instruments of survival and progress, but they remain wary of provoking the US—or of allowing Castro to provoke the US—by going too far and too fast with a military buildup. In their 11 September statement they sought to undercut speculation about Soviet missile bases in Cuba for possible use against the US by, *inter alia*, stressing the defensive nature of armaments supplied Cuba and by denying any military need for such bases in view of their capability to attack the US from their own territory.

8. While Soviet policies in Cuba may have initially been devised almost entirely in terms of Cuba and Latin America, Moscow now also views the situation in terms of the broader East-West struggle. They relish the demonstration that Soviet power can be extended to an area adjacent to the US, and are using the strong US reaction to justify their own resentment of the "offensive" US bases on the Soviet periphery. Further, in their 11 September statement, the Soviets implied that US action against Cuba would be countered by Bloc moves elsewhere in the world and for the first time publicly linked the Berlin and Cuban crises. The Soviets are also aware that a drastic heightening of tension over Cuba is an important factor in their general relations with the US and has an impact on various other issues. Thus developments in the Cuban situation probably influenced the re-

cent Soviet decision to let the Berlin situation simmer, rather than boil, for the time being.

9. The current Soviet buildup marks a dramatic change of pace in Soviet operations, probably occasioned by a reappraisal of policies and increased determination to insure the survival of the Castro regime. However, we believe that the military buildup which began in July does not reflect a radically new Soviet policy toward Cuba, either in terms of military commitments or of the role of Cuba in overall Soviet strategy. Without changing the essentially defensive character of the military buildup in Cuba and without making an open pledge to protect Cuba under all circumstances, the Soviets have enhanced Cuban military capabilities, repeated in stronger terms their warnings to the US, and tied the Cuban situation to the general question of the East-West confrontation.

10. The Soviets themselves are probably still uncertain about their future military program for Cuba. Indeed, they probably intend to test US and Latin American reactions as they proceed. At the same time they are obliged to tailor their policy to minimize risks of confrontation with the US, avoid friction with Castro, and maintain the best possible propaganda stance in the eyes of Latin America and the world in general.

11. The analysis of Soviet policy toward Cuba given here is based on an overall evaluation of Soviet interests and intentions and on evidence of Soviet actions in and with respect to Cuba to date. While it is our judgment that, even in the light of recent developments, Soviet policy remains fundamentally unaltered, we cannot exclude the possibility that Moscow is at least considering a change in this policy. Consequently, in the sections which follow, we examine in some detail not only the Soviet military buildup in Cuba to date and possible developments in that buildup which might follow, but also the nature and implications of military assistance which the

Soviets could provide Cuba in the event of a major change of policy.

II. THE BUILDUP TO DATE

12. In the first phase of the provision of military supplies, from 1960 to early 1962, the Soviets concentrated on substantial amounts of conventional combat weapons for the ground forces. A number of Bloc technicians were supplied and a training program for Cuban military personnel was inaugurated. The buildup proceeded at a deliberate pace and eventually, after some training of Cuban pilots, about 60 jet fighter aircraft were supplied to Cuba. In addition, some submarine-chasers and motor torpedo boats were delivered. This phase was largely completed by February 1962 with the result that Cuban forces were much better prepared to handle incursions upon their territory.

13. In July the Soviets began a rapid effort to strengthen Cuban defenses against air attack and major seaborne invasion. Between mid-July and early September some 70 ships have delivered various types of military supplies and construction equipment, and more ships are en route. These new shipments have consisted in part of further deliveries of types of weapons already available to Cuban forces. More tanks, self-propelled guns and other ground force equipment have been supplied. But the bulk of the material delivered is related to the establishment of SA-2 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), which will form the basis for a new air defense system.

14. Thus far, 12 SA-2 SAM sites have been installed in the western half of the island. It is likely that similar coverage will be provided in the eastern half. Some missile sites could now be operational. The Soviets are also providing a number of more advanced jet interceptors; about a dozen MIG-21's may have been delivered. The standard armament for this type of aircraft includes two

infrared homing air-to-air missiles (AAMs). It is likely that such missiles have accompanied the MIG-21's to Cuba.

15. The current buildup also reflects an effort to improve Cuba's coastal defenses. For this purpose, the Soviets have provided the "Komar" class guided-missile patrol boats which carry two short-range (10-15 n.m.) cruise-type missiles, primarily for use against shipping. This boat has a range of about 650 n.m., but is designed primarily for use in coastal waters. Eight "Komar" class boats have already been delivered and other similar craft may be on the way. In addition, a land-based cruise-type missile installation has been observed near Banes.

Its range is likely to be limited to 20-35 n.m. by its radar horizon. This range might be extended by installing the radar on a height, or by employing ships or aircraft for forward observation. We believe that this will prove to be a coast defense installation and that others of this type will be deployed, but we cannot estimate at present the ultimate size of this program.

16. Equally important, particularly in terms of overall Soviet involvement, is the substantial increase in the number of Soviet military specialists in Cuba, from about 350 early this year to the current level of about 4,000. We anticipate that a large proportion of this group will remain in Cuba for some time. Six months to a year would be required before the SA-2 and other sites could be operated solely by Cuban personnel.

17. Because of the extent and rapidity of current deliveries and limitations in our intelligence coverage, we cannot yet identify all of the new equipment which has been introduced. Recent shipments include a great deal of electronic gear, with many vans, crates, and large boxes which could contain various types of this equipment. There is tenuous evidence of the presence of air defense ECM

equipment. Although we have no specific evidence of it, we cannot exclude the possibility that COMINT and ELINT equipment is also now present in Cuba.

Implications of the Current Buildup

18. In terms of their military significance, the current Soviet deliveries are substantially improving capabilities in Cuba for air and coastal defense and defensive surface naval operations. When operational, the SAMs will assure that interception can be attempted under any weather condition, at altitudes up to 60,000 feet, with more limited effectiveness up to 80,000 feet. The system is probably not effective below about 3,000 feet. The MIG-21 has generally better performance characteristics than the earlier MIG models, and will considerably augment defenses against aircraft flying at medium and high altitudes.

19. The large number of Soviet military personnel in Cuba will provide the technical assistance and training necessary to bring the newer weapons to operational readiness in the near future. If necessary, Soviet personnel could be employed to operate them before Cuban personnel are fully prepared to do so. It is likely that training and experience have already raised the proficiency of Cuban Air Force personnel somewhat above the low level noted in NIE 85-2-62, "The Situation and Prospects in Cuba," dated 1 August 1962 (paragraph 24). Soviet guidance and training will continue to raise the combat effectiveness of all branches of the Cuban military establishment.

20. Some of the new weapons in Cuba could be used for offensive as well as defensive purposes. MIG fighters can be equipped for ground attack operations and antiship mis-

For a more detailed description of the performance characteristics of these weapon systems, see the forthcoming NIE 11-3-62, "Soviet Bloc Air and Missile Defense Capabilities through Mid-1967," scheduled for USIB consideration 26 September.

siles can be employed against well-defined land targets. Indirectly, the presence of SAMs could release some fighter aircraft for ground attack missions. Nevertheless, the pattern of Soviet military aid to date appears clearly designed to strengthen the defenses of the island, thereby protecting the Communist political beachhead in the Western Hemisphere and raising the price the US would have to pay to eliminate it by military action. The overall composition of the Cuban military establishment remains essentially defensive in character; it has not yet been provided with a significant strike capability. Moreover, the Cuban armed forces still lack the air and sealift necessary for military operations on any significant scale in neighboring territories.

21. Limited as the offensive capabilities of the forces in Cuba are, an increased sense of security instilled by Soviet public statements and by the presence of new weapons may encourage the Cuban regime to engage in small scale filibustering expeditions. It might also encourage them to make new demands on the US regarding the naval base at Guantanamo and to engage in a program of harassment of the base.

III. POSSIBILITIES FOR EXPANSION OF THE BUILDUP

22. The Soviets could expand the present buildup to include additional types of weapons. However, they are well aware that the question of offensive as opposed to defensive weapons in Cuba has become a major political issue. Their recent statement indicates that they believe a strong political case can be sustained for supplying "defensive" weapons in Cuba. Conversely they seem to realize that to provide certain other types of weapons to Cuba would pose a challenge to which the US might forcefully respond.

23. Among the weapons which the Soviets might believe they could add to the Cuban

arsenal without creating the appearance of an open defiance of US warnings on offensive weapons, are a low altitude SAM defense system and jet interceptors more advanced than the MIG-21's. However, both of these are believed to be in short supply within the USSR itself, where they are in the early stages of deployment. Moreover, the military potential of these weapons can be fully realized only in conjunction with the USSR's closely integrated system of air defense warning, communications, and control.

24. Apart from such examples, however, the distinction between defensive and offensive weapons is ambiguous. The Soviets might consider supplying BEAGLE (IL-28) light bombers, for example, which they have already provided to several non-Bloc states. These aircraft can be represented by the Soviets as "defensive" weapons, particularly if present only in small numbers. On the other hand, the IL-28 could reach targets in the southeastern part of the US and could carry nuclear weapons. If these aircraft appeared in Cuba, the US would have to decide whether or not they were to be taken as representing a serious "offensive" capability. On the whole we believe the Soviets might calculate that a modest number of IL-28's could be supplied to Cuba without serious risk of US counteraction.

25. BADGER (TU-16) medium bombers might also be supplied to Cuba, ostensibly for such "defensive" uses as armed reconnaissance against invasion shipping, but the offensive capabilities of these aircraft are considerably more obvious than in the case of IL-28's. We believe the Soviets would not supply them to Cuba.

26. It is possible that the Soviets would consider placing other short-range surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) in Cuba. The SS-1, a ballistic missile with a range of 150 n.m., would not threaten US territory other than Key West, but the 350 n.m. range of the SS-2 ballistic missile would extend to Cape

Canaveral. The Soviets also have a 350 n.m. cruise-type missile available. These weapons could employ conventional or nuclear warheads. It is possible that the Soviets would believe that some SS-2's would be tolerated by the US. On the other hand, any real military usefulness they might have to the Cuban defense establishment would be marginal, and the Soviets could not exclude that the US would react very strongly to their presence.

27. Another possibility is the provision of submarines and destroyers. We believe this may eventually be done. Some conventional submarines have already been supplied to non-Bloc countries, but the Soviets certainly realize that such action in Cuba could be interpreted by the US as violating their stated intention of limiting supplies to defensive purposes. However, the level of Soviet naval supply to Cuba will probably remain relatively high in coming months. Soviet merchant ships and trawlers will continue their frequent calls. The Soviets could test the US reaction to visits by Soviet naval ships to Cuban ports. Depending on US reactions over a period of time, the Soviets might then consider whether to turn over some destroyers and submarines to Cuba.

28. Thus the Soviets may experiment with a number of further steps in the military buildup. They may feel that some of these are necessary, if only to demonstrate their continuing support to Castro and refusal to be deterred by the US. The SA-2 defense system will provide a new degree of protection and secrecy for masking additional moves. But the Soviets would be proceeding over uncertain ground and could not be sure of US knowledge of or reaction to each new move, or that the gains of each further step would be commensurate with the risks. They would also have to consider that Bloc personnel would be required to operate many of the additional weapons. Thus a decision to provide such weapons as bombers, submarines, or a

ditional types of short-range missiles depends greatly on whether the Soviets estimate that these weapons can be introduced without precipitating a US intervention. They will realize that the nature of the US reaction will depend not only on types and numbers of weapons, but also on the offensive capability of the total military establishment in Cuba.

Use of Cuba as a Soviet Strategic Missile Base

29. The establishment on Cuban soil of Soviet nuclear striking forces which could be used against the US would be incompatible with Soviet policy as we presently estimate it. It would indicate a far greater willingness to increase the level of risk in US-Soviet relations than the USSR has displayed thus far, and this would have important policy implications in other areas. However, Soviet military planners have almost certainly considered the contribution which Cuban bases might make to the Soviet strategic posture and, in that connection, the feasibility and utility of deploying nuclear delivery systems to Cuba. Therefore this contingency must be examined carefully, even though it would run counter to current Soviet policy.

30. Soviet planners might see some utility in deploying MRBMs and IRBMs to Cuba in order to supplement the limited number of ICBMs now believed to be operational in the USSR and to reach targets beyond the range of submarine-launched missiles. Cuban-based MRBMs with a range of 1,100 n.m. could reach targets as far north as Philadelphia and Cleveland and as far west as Oklahoma City; the 2,200 n.m. IRBMs could reach all US targets except some points in the Pacific Northwest. All of these targets can now be covered by ICBMs launched from the USSR. However, MRBMs or IRBMs deployed in Cuba would permit nuclear blows at an increased number of targets and would increase the total weight of the attack which could be delivered against the US in the event of general war.

31. The establishment on Cuban soil of a significant strike capability with such weapons would represent a sharp departure from Soviet practice, since such weapons have so far not been installed even in Satellite territory. Serious problems of command and control would arise. There would also have to be a conspicuously larger number of Soviet personnel in Cuba, which, at least initially, would be a political liability in Latin America. The Soviets might think that the political effect of denying the US by stationing Soviet nuclear striking power in so menacing a position would be worth a good deal if they could get away with it. However, they would almost certainly estimate that this could not be done without provoking a dangerous US reaction.

32. A Soviet submarine base in Cuba could be of considerable military value to the USSR. Submarines operating from a Cuban base could be maintained on station off the US coast for much longer periods than can now be sustained in operations from Northern Fleet bases. Such a forward base would permit Soviet missile and torpedo attack submarines, both conventional and nuclear-powered, more readily to conduct routine patrols off the US coast. It is possible that the Soviets might seek to establish such a base in connection with the provision of some submarines to the Cubans. They might reason that even when Soviet use became apparent, the US, with naval bases at Holy Loch and Guantanamo, would be in a poor position to protest. In terms of both feasibility and utility, the establishment of a Soviet submarine base appears more likely than the deployment of Soviet nuclear-armed missile forces to Cuban soil. Even so, the Soviets would probably calculate the risk of US intervention as too great for such an undertaking at the present time.

33. Although the Soviets may see some military advantages in Cuba as a strategic strike base, the risks would be great and the political

Implications would run counter to the kind of policy they are actually pursuing in Latin America. They do not propose to win the region for communism by military conquest. They count instead on a process of political action which will build a mass following for Communist or Communist-allied leaders who would then be capable of replacing existing governments.

IV. LATIN AMERICAN REACTION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

34. Much of the Latin American public will react to the military buildup in Cuba and to evidences of Soviet intent to protect Castro without taking account of the particular weapons involved or of their capabilities and without reading between the lines of Soviet statements. Most of these Latin Americans will consider this intrusion of an extra-continental power to be a bad thing in itself, but at the same time will regard the problem as one to be met by the US and not their responsibility. Any disposition on the part of the Latin American governments to do something about it would depend greatly upon the lead given by the US, and this disposition would tend to fade if the US failed to come up with feasible courses of action. Some Latin Americans, of course, will be quick to note that the Soviets had intruded into the Hemisphere and will infer that the US had failed to rebuff this intrusion because it lacked the power or the will to do so.

35. In the Caribbean states there will be a much more pronounced tendency than elsewhere to interpret the military buildup in Cuba as a direct threat. They are not likely to expect that missiles will be fired at them, but that Soviet weapons and Soviet support will encourage Castro to intervene in their countries on behalf of radical revolutionists.

36. Among Latin American governments there are wide differences of opinion as to the role they as individual governments and as members of the OAS should play in the current situation. We estimate the chances are better now than they were at Punta del Este to obtain the two-thirds majority in the OAS required for sanctions and other steps short of direct military action aimed at Cuba. If it became clear that the Soviets were establishing an offensive base in Cuba most Latin American governments would expect the US to intervene and eliminate it, but many of them would still seek to avoid direct involvement.

37. In the longer run, if the Castro regime remains securely in power and the Cuban economy is developed substantially with Soviet help, the cohesion of the inter-American system will probably weaken further. Several countries would probably assume an "independent" position like that of Brazil. They would thereby position themselves for a closer accommodation with the Soviet Union, and when desired, and would attempt to obtain assistance from both sides, in the manner of India and Indonesia.